

Belfort & Lupin

Royal Reunion

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Synopsis

Following traumatic events that caused him to flee into the forest, Belfort returns to the Palace of Versailles in the hopes of reconciling with his family. However, this proves to be more difficult than he could have ever anticipated.

Notes

This is a non-canonical event that takes place very shortly after the events of the TV show's Season 1 finale, "The Big Bad Wolf". This may also be considered an Alternate Universe Fanfiction.

Chapter 1

You may have heard several stories regarding King Louis XIV's favorite royal dog, Augustin Prosper de Belfort, who has always been known simply as Belfort, and his dearest friend, a wild wolf named Lupin. He had no other names, he was just simply known as Lupin, no matter who you ask. Naturally, being a wolf from the wild, only animals are aware of his kind-hearted nature, even if some are more comfortable near him than others. Humans, however, only see a bloodthirsty monster, and if Lupin is found within the palace grounds, one of two different things could happen. If the human or humans that find him are holding a sharp weapon, whether a spear or a pitchfork, they may threaten him with it, maybe even attempt to thrust it through the top of his head. If the human is unarmed, they will run for the nearest palace guard, crying "Wolf!" Unlike a certain boy who cried "Wolf!" the cries are warranted. Though in several instances, Lupin is nowhere to be found where he had been located, due in no small part to his collaboration with the royal dog.

However those around him perceived him, whether friend or beast, Lupin's kind-hearted nature remains intact, and his strong bond with Belfort grows no weaker. The two have had several ventures within the palace grounds and the nearby forest where Lupin sleeps up in a leaning tree during the cold nights. Their adventures typically consisted of helping other animals, whether from the Royal Menagerie, within the palace itself, or on occasion, from the wilderness itself. Their teamwork and compassion had always pulled through in completing the task with which they had undertaken. When they were not helping another animal, they would spend their time in the forest or at the top of the palace steps, admiring a view of the sky, whether sunrise, sunset, or during the night, when the only sources of light were the stars and the moon.

But one night, Belfort and Lupin would take on a task that nearly destroyed relationships. Not exactly their own, but nonetheless, the event was far more tragic. A wolf had been spotted within the palace grounds. On King Louis's orders, every gate within the vicinity was closed, with the thought that the wolf would be trapped within, preventing its escape into the forest. In the morning, the king would then order his royal dogs to find the wolf and kill it.

Belfort fretted because he was under the belief that Lupin was the wolf in question. However, his fears were unfounded. The guards were chasing an alpha wolf named Remus, who had no trust for humans or dogs. Nonetheless, he allowed Belfort and Lupin to help him escape into the forest, but warned that there would be bloodshed if young Belfort turned out to have been deceiving him.

Morning came, and the king's royal dogs, which consisted of Belfort's mother Diane and sisters Tane and Ponne, were on the hunt. However, a plan to help Remus escape had finally been formulated. He was to sneak out of the forest by secretly riding in the back of a cart ridden by a woodman who was to go out into the forest to collect wood. Due to the enforced closure of the palace gates, however, the woodman needed to convince the guards at said gates to open up so he can pass through and please the king with the stock he had gathered from his venture. To keep the royal dogs off Remus's trail, Lupin masked the alpha wolf's scent with his own and allowed the royal dogs to chase him until he escaped into the forest.

Upon the young wolf's escape, the hunt was ended by the king and the palace gates were allowed to be opened once more. Belfort, however, was reprimanded by his mother and sisters, who still believed Lupin was the wolf they had been targeting.

"If you helped the wolf to escape," said Diane, "then you have disobeyed the king's orders, and that is unforgivable!"

As the royal dogs were returning to the palace, Belfort was devastated, knowing that during the time taken to plan Remus's escape, Lupin, who had never lived with a wolfpack, had received an offer from Remus to join his wolfpack. Remus believed that one day, if Lupin stayed near Belfort, he would be betrayed. When Lupin escaped into the forest with Remus, Belfort believed his only true friend had left him behind to live in a wolfpack, and expressed his feelings to his sisters, which in retrospect, was not such a good idea.

"Thanks to you," said Belfort, "I have lost my only friend in the world. He's gone."

"Of course he's gone!" responded Tane. "Who would ever want to be friends with someone like you?"

His whole life, Belfort had been at the mercy of his sisters' several means of torture, whether physical or psychological. But this time, they had gone too far. They didn't seem to care about this heartless comment, which was the straw that broke the camel's back as it were. The cackling of his sisters left Belfort in tears, and he fled into the forest a sobbing mess. He met Lupin there, learning he had actually rejected Remus's offer to join the wolfpack, for he believes his true home is in Versailles, with the comfort of the young royal dog. Belfort was relieved that his one true friend had not abandoned him, and for the next approximately twelve hours, they were frolicking in the woods.

Chapter 2

The last thing Belfort and Lupin were doing before anything changed was scratching their backs on tree bark. It was a very relaxing massage for animals that lived in the wild that Lupin had taught Belfort once before. The two canines really soaked in the tree scratches, eyelids half-closed, panting with dangling tongues, and in the end, once they were finished, they had both fallen to practically the same spot on the ground, Belfort dropping first and Lupin on top. Their satisfied exhalations signified their relaxed state.

"That felt so good, huh?" asked Lupin.

"Quite," replied Belfort. "Though if I must be frank, nothing compares to the affection I receive at the palace."

Belfort's own mention of the palace caused him to remember the dreadful words of his own family that followed the escape of both wolves that morning. His mother scolding his actions as unforgivable, and his sisters' gleeful laughter at the prospect that he had forever lost his dearest friend in the world. These memories, having been so recent, wouldn't have been memories that he would forget. But in the twelve hours he had spent in the forest with Lupin, Belfort's mind had not been settled on the scornings of his own family. Lupin could tell his friend was troubled, and so lifted himself off his friend's back and sat upright.

"Is something wrong, Belfort?" he asked.

Belfort said with a sigh, "My dear Lupin, the events of today are still playing in my mind. My hard work has earned me a scolding from my mother, and my sisters couldn't take more joy in my suffering. I have disgraced my royal family!" he cried.

"Hmm... It's getting a little late," said Lupin. "Maybe you can still go back to the palace and make up?"

"You don't understand, my dear Lupin," said Belfort. "My master Louis ordered the royal dogs to hunt down that wolf, and I disobeyed that order. An order from the king!"

"Oh come on! Maybe that sounds like a big deal, but we've done plenty of things outside the laws of the land!"

It is true. Most of their adventures would require Belfort and Lupin to break a few rules for the sake of rescuing a friend. In between missions, on occasion, Lupin, sometimes accompanied by Belfort, would sneak into the palace kitchen to snatch cooked meat, or even brioches. Belfort hated hunting, and Lupin was no natural hunter, for he had been a lone wolf his whole life. Until he met Belfort, that is. In fact, Lupin had no memory of his family at all.

"This misstep particularly hurt my royal family," said Belfort. "I shall never truly know what trouble it has caused. They must all surely hate me now. My mother, my sisters... even my master Louis."

"No, that's impossible," assured Lupin. "Surely not your master Louis."

A voice broke through the air of the forest. It was a deep voice, one of a man driven silly by his strong duty being interfered with due to a certain occasional disappearance, calling out the name,

"Belfort!"

The two canines perked their ears at the sound of this voice, which Belfort clearly recognizes.

"That sounded like Bazire!" he cried with excitement, relieved that someone from the palace is looking for him, even if it is, for all intents and purposes, his least favorite human.

Bazire is the king's Royal Dog Valet, whose duty is to care for the royal dogs, whether grooming or generally tending to them when they fall ill. He depends heavily on everything running on schedule. Anything that goes wrong, for example, Belfort going missing, which happens too often for his tastes, causes his mind to race with madness. But whichever human from the palace was calling his name, Belfort was happy to know he was being looked for.

But doubts sank in once more, due in no small part to the reprimands Belfort received. "But no, I can't... I can't go back to the palace!"

"Sure you can!" encouraged Lupin.

"But what if master Louis doesn't love me anymore?" worried Belfort.

"What if he does? You'll never know unless you go back with Bazire," said Lupin.

"Belfort, where are you?!" called the voice again. "His Majesty is worried sick!"

That was all Belfort needed to hear. His master truly did want him back. "I must go back to the palace!" said Belfort. "Au revoir, Lupin!"

Au revoir is a French goodbye not to be confused with *adieu*, which is typically reserved for farewells, as in the type that, as far as the speaker is concerned, would last forever. Obviously, this wouldn't be the last time Belfort would see Lupin, but nonetheless, he ran off to find the man who called for him.

His name was being called multiple times, meaning all Belfort would have to do is follow the sound of the voice that was calling him. Eventually, he found the source, which is a stout, pudgy man sporting tall golden hair accompanied by two soldiers from the palace. Obviously, the soldiers accompanied him as a form of protection in the event they were to encounter any wild beasts in the forest. None of these humans were sure they would find Belfort alive, but no one could be more relieved than the stout man known as Bazire when the young dog came running up to them.

"Ah! Belfort! There you are!" Bazire called as Belfort reached him, then leaped to place his paws on the human's shoulders, continually licking his face.

Bazire was positively tickled by the affection by the royal dog before soon telling him to stop. Belfort planted all four paws back on the ground and sat, still panting from the excitement.

"We have been waiting for you since dinner time, but you never showed," said Bazire. "Come now. We must go back at once."

Bazire turned on his heel and began walking in the opposite direction, the soldiers and the dog following behind. Whatever awaited Belfort once he was out of the forest and within the palace grounds once more, he did not yet know, and was nervous to find out. But there is one thing to put his mind at ease; his master Louis still cares for him.

Chapter 3

It took about five minutes for Bazire and Belfort to return to the open gates that separate the Palace of Versailles from the forest. Once the man and the dog have stepped within the vicinity, the two guards that accompanied Bazire resumed their post near those same gates. Even within the safety of his own home, Belfort's mind was still scrambled. His nervousness is well-earned, however. He still wasn't sure how his reunion with his mother and sisters would turn out. But he continued to follow Bazire to the steps of the palace, where King Louis XIV had been waiting this whole time.

"Ah, I see that you have located Belfort," said the king. "Well done, Bazire."

"Why thank you, my liege," said Bazire with a bow. "I thought for some time I would have to give up and be sent to the galleys."

"Well, you need not fear that now," said the king. "As long as he's home safe and sound, that's all that matters."

King Louis showed his undying affection toward Belfort by reaching his hand down and stroking his head. Belfort recognized the loving affection and allowed his tongue to dangle from his open mouth again as his master stroked him.

"Now, since Belfort has missed dinner, the chef has prepared something special for him. It might be cold by now, but I'm sure he won't mind. After all, he must be absolutely famished right now."

Belfort felt a rumble in his stomach. He confirms for Louis that he is, in fact, very hungry. All Louis, or any other human, hears from Belfort is a whimper. But that was all they needed for confirmation to the query regarding his hunger.

"Come along now. Your meal awaits. Oh, and Bazire, if you wouldn't mind. Wait for us in the royal dog chamber. Belfort needs his fur brushed before he goes to bed."

"Yes, of course, Your Majesty," said Bazire.

Louis turns and walks into the palace, with Belfort following him in. Bazire also enters the palace, but the humans, of course, have different directions in mind, given that one of them was the king, and he had given an

order. Bazire makes his way to the royal dog chamber while Louis guided his dog, who had only recently returned from the wilderness, to the palace kitchen.

The chef was still there in the kitchen, though not exactly prepared for the moment he would see Belfort again. He always enjoyed Belfort's presence in the palace kitchen, giving him the occasional biscotin. Belfort would even get two biscotins on his own insistence, not to eat for himself, but to pass to Lupin in secret. This time, however, Belfort would need more than a biscotin to fill his empty stomach, and everyone in the palace knew it.

"My dear chef," said Louis. "Belfort has come home at last."

"At last?" said the surprised chef. "But the food I have prepared for him has already gone cold, Your Majesty!"

"I'm sure he won't mind," said the king.

The chef then grabbed a plate from the table in the middle of the room. On this plate was a large roast chicken. When Belfort saw the dish, his tail wagged and his tongue dangled as the chef set the dish down on the floor in front of him. He stood to step closer to the dish, not taking a whiff, for he had no sense of smell, a defect from birth, and began eating the roast chicken, his tail still wagging.

"You're right, Your Majesty," remarked the chef. "He doesn't mind at all. In fact, he looks happy."

"But of course," laughed the king. "He was most certainly famished by the time he came back to us."

Once Belfort had licked the dish clean upon finishing off the roast chicken, the king escorted him to the royal dog chamber. Bazire was there, waiting. Once the king had left Belfort in the room, Bazire signaled him to leap atop the cushioned stool to be brushed.

As Belfort's fur was being brushed, he looked about the room. His sisters, Tane and Ponne, were already fast asleep on their beds. His mother Diane had her own bed atop a throne, as she is the alpha of her own little pack. Even though Belfort gazed in his mother's direction, Diane did not return the gaze. It wasn't like Diane to avoid eye contact when any of her children wished to speak with her, but after events that took place that day, this should have come as no surprise.

"Mother..." said Belfort in an attempt to start a conversation at least. "I... I'm home. Well... didn't you want to welcome me back?"

"Belfort," Diane said coldly, "I have nothing more to say to you after everything that happened today."

"I understand if you're still upset," said Belfort. "I'm really sorry. I have been wondering if--"

"Perhaps my words are falling on deaf ears?" said Diane. "I have nothing more to say. After Bazire has finished brushing your fur, you are to go straight to bed."

"Then I suppose we shall speak tomorrow?"

"Hmph!" was Diane's only response, and she laid her head down on her bed, facing completely away from Belfort.

By this time, Bazire had finished the brushing, and it was time for Belfort to lie down in his own bed. He does so with a sigh, and takes one last gaze at his mother, who still wouldn't meet eyes with him. Belfort closes his eyes, and begins to sleep. His hopes were that in the morning, Diane would be more susceptible to conversation regarding the events that took place on that day.

Chapter 4

Morning came, and the dogs' breakfast was being served. The king's servants entered the royal dog chamber holding trays with dome covers. They laid those trays on the floor and lifted the covers, revealing four bowls of dog food, one in each tray, then left the chamber. All four royal dogs stepped out of their beds to eat their breakfast.

Not one of them were in a jolly mood as they ate, Belfort least so of them all. In his break between scooping bits of dog food in his mouth, he looked to his mother, hoping she would look his way and a conversation would start. But Diane ignored his gaze and continued to eat, as though she were never being watched. Before Belfort returned to eating his own food, however, he noticed a gaze from his sisters, as though they had something they wanted to say to him. While Belfort did lock eyes with his sisters, it was only for a few seconds. Not trusting them to not barrage him with more insults, he simply scoffed and continued to eat. Little did he know that Tane and Ponne were met with a glare from their mother. They sighed and so continued to eat.

At some period of time after the royal dogs had finished eating their breakfast, Belfort treaded a hallway in the palace, feeling forlorn. His mother didn't want to talk to him, and his sisters, in all likelihood, had thought of some cruel joke or something of that nature to play on their brother, as if they hadn't hurt him enough. His depression hadn't gone unnoticed. Before long, Belfort met his master Louis again, who knelt down to speak with him as though he were speaking to his own human child.

"Oh Belfort, why the long face?" asked the king. "Has your family been treating you well?"

Even though Belfort said "no" with a bowed head, all the king heard was a whimper. That was all master Louis needed, however. As a way of comfort, the king reached and stroked his dog's head.

"It's okay, Belfort," reassured Louis. "No matter what your family thinks, whether or not it was you who let that wolf escape, I'll always love you."

It was always reassuring to know that, in spite of how his dog family viewed him now, his very human master still held Belfort in deep regard in spite of his faults. What he lacks in a sense of smell, athleticism, courage, or

ability to hunt, he makes up for with his kind-heartedness. That is why master Louis loves him, regardless of how the other palace dogs see Belfort.

Louis had no time to play with Belfort at that moment, for he had several royal duties he needed to attend to. Belfort was less bothered by his master's busy schedule and more so by the comfort being insufficient to relieve his broken heart. But what else could his master do? He didn't know the exact details of the day before any better than his dog family did. He didn't even know that for the longest time, Belfort had befriended a wolf come from the wild, despite once rescuing said wolf from a ditch long ago. On Belfort's insistence, of course.

In his hour of depression still, Belfort took a walk on his own beside the Grand Canal. His thoughts racing in his mind, he didn't even notice his dearest friend until he heard his muffled voice.

"Hey, Belfort!"

When he turned to see Lupin, it immediately became clear why his voice was muffled. Between his teeth, he held two brioches that he had snatched from the palace kitchen. Belfort did nothing to hide his newfound paranoia.

"Lupin! Have you been in the palace kitchen just for a couple of brioches? What if you got spotted again? I didn't want a repeat of that whole ordeal from yesterday!"

Before speaking again, Lupin dropped both brioches on the ground in front of him.

"I understand if it makes you paranoid," he said, "but everything's fine. No one saw me. Besides, I wasn't gonna eat both of these myself. That's why I got two of them. One for me, and one for you."

"Oh. Well... thank you, my dear Lupin," said Belfort, already having determined his friend's goal in gathering the brioches, owing to Lupin's kindness. "But please stop scaring me."

"Can't make any promises," laughed Lupin.

Belfort's mind was still filled with what his family had said to him, but he was in the company of his best friend, who had offered a small snack to share between the two. So even if for only a few minutes, Belfort feasted on the brioche his friend had given him, just as Lupin feasted on his own. The

moment they finished was the moment Belfort knew he would have to tell Lupin about his experiences both the night before and this morning.

“So? How did it go with your family?” asked Lupin.

“Not well at all,” said Belfort, lowering his head.

“Oh no. What happened?”

“Well, I certainly wasn’t going to talk to my sisters, because they’d no doubt want to throw more nasty words my way. But my mother just wouldn’t speak to me. I imagine she is still angry with me.”

“I guess she would be. She probably doesn’t even know they went after the wrong wolf. I think you just need to give her some time. She’ll come around eventually.”

“Hmm... I hope you’re right.”

Belfort truly wanted to believe this. But he wasn’t sure. How could he be sure after the scolding he had received? If his own mother said his actions were unforgivable, how could a boy possibly believe he would eventually be forgiven for his transgression? Belfort was thankful for a positive friend like Lupin. The wolf’s foreleg wrapped around his friend’s back so his paw would settle on his opposite shoulder.

“Everything will be back to normal,” said Lupin. “I’m sure of it. You, your mother and your sisters will be one happy family again.”

“My sisters, too?” said Belfort, not wanting to think about his sisters.

“Sure!” said Lupin. “I mean, they may have been turkeys, but they’re still your family.”

“Lupin, I appreciate the thought,” said Belfort, “but at the moment, all I care about is reconciling with my mother. If at any point in time I wish to speak to my sisters, I will do so. But now is not a good time.”

“Okay,” the wolf shrugged. “I’m sure you know what you’re doing.”

As a matter of fact, Belfort did not know what he was doing. You see, over 300 years following the time in which this story takes place, there would be another story written. It would not be a book or a play, but something much grander in scale. The story, taking place far away from Earth, concerns a young boy who is a prophesied chosen one, but as he grew into an adult, was consumed by his negative emotions and turned to the evil he was supposed to

destroy. Such turn was foreshadowed by a strange, elderly little creature with the following words;

“Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering.”

Little did Belfort suspect that such fear of his sisters’ continued cruelty would give truth to those words that would be spoken over 300 years later. But he wasn’t thinking about that now. He was thinking more about how to reconcile with his mother. The advice Lupin gave him seemed sound, but even the words of his dearest friend alone wasn’t enough to ease his mind. He needed a second opinion.

Chapter 5

Belfort turned to the Royal Menagerie. Having entered the enclosure, he was greeted by several friends, including but not limited to the hundred-year-old elephant Madame Rosa, who was previously owned by the King of Portugal, her two ostrich cronies Madame de Buc and Madame de Bec, and a South American llama named Serge. These four were the first to welcome him back to the vicinity of the palace.

“Welcome home, amigo!” said Serge. “It hasn’t been the same without you!”

“Oh please,” laughed Belfort. “It’s only been one day.”

“But it felt like ages!” said Madame Rosa. “Has everything been alright with you, Belfort?”

“I must confess, not exactly,” said Belfort. “My relationship with my mother has gone rather sour.

“I’d imagine it would,” said Madame Rosa. “After all, you did disobey an order from the king. A most terrible thing!”

Madame de Buc and Madame de Bec agreed that this was a most terrible act. The two ostriches would agree with Madame Rosa on everything she says with no question whatsoever.

“All just to protect a dear friend,” Belfort confirmed. “My cause was a noble one, you see. I just wish she could see that.”

“And I don’t see why she shouldn’t,” said Richard de Rastignasse, the African lion who lives in the menagerie, sat atop a large rock. “Belfort, you and Lupin have done so much for the palace. For us here in the menagerie. For those who live in the palace itself. And yes, even for your family.”

On a few occasions, Lupin would assist Belfort when his family was in need. Belfort’s sisters were once lost in the labyrinth, his mother once had fleas, and all three of the females ached in their stomachs after having consumed what turned out to be cocoa in the king’s leftovers. In both instances when Diane had to be relieved of a malady, she did silently thank Lupin for his help, and for what Rastignasse would say next, this information is really important to consider.

"We are all thankful for what you have done for us," continued Rastignasse. "Yet when you save the life of your friend, which your family was ordered to take, your family sends you away."

"You misunderstand, Richard," said Belfort. "They didn't send me away. I ran off voluntarily after--"

"The point I am trying to make, Belfort, is this," said Rastignasse. "Your mother was wrong to say your actions were unforgivable. She and her daughters failed to catch the wolf, and simply needed an outlet to express their frustration. And you just happened to be a convenient target."

"Is that how you see it?" asked Madame Rosa.

"I don't see how it could be anything else," said Rastignasse.

Madame Rosa would much rather stick to the simple conclusions than anything like what Rastignasse had to say. "Well, I say Diane is only upset because her son disobeyed the king. Simple as that, and nothing else."

"Simple as that!" agreed the ostriches. In a sense, it really could be this simple, but Belfort was determined to keep his patience.

"Well, whatever the case, I'm just waiting. I'm sure that in time, my mother will forgive what I had done.

"I agree," said Rastignasse. "Your mother is not one to hold grudges."

"I just wish Lupin the best," said Madame Rosa, who didn't have as much care for wild animals. "I'm sure he'll forget all the pain in the near future."

Of course, the Royal Menagerie wouldn't have been aware that Lupin is still living near the palace as a lone wolf. Belfort felt the need to inform them at once.

"Oh. How marvelous." Madame Rosa's response was less than genuine.

But Belfort got the second opinion he sought. He still wasn't going to speak to his sisters, but he was willing to wait until it was time to speak to his mother.

Chapter 6

Belfort failed to notice the glare his sisters received from their mother that morning, so he never knew what was happening between them. In the time before Belfort returned to the palace, Tane and Ponne spoke with their mother about something else Belfort failed to notice. This time, it was in regards to what happened after the last thing they said to him.

“Of course he’s gone! Who would ever want to be friends with someone like you?”

The laughter of his sisters, which followed those words, caused Belfort to run into the forest in tears. What he failed to notice was his sisters’ guilty faces as he ran off. Never before had they felt such guilt for their actions. Before this happened, when the king gave the order for the royal dogs to hunt down the wolf, Tane and Ponne were more than happy to take on the opportunity, believing just the same as their mother and brother that the wolf in question was Lupin. They believed the blood of the wolf would cause Belfort the worst sorrow he could ever experience in his life. Now that they have caused it, in spite of the wolf having lived, they realized just how unrewarding it really was.

As for why they wanted to cause Belfort sorrow in the first place, it was not simply for his inabilities; lacking a sense of smell, athleticism, or even for his cowardice or his disdain for hunting. It was their master’s love for Belfort in spite of those inabilities. The king held Belfort in such high regard, and his sisters didn’t think he was worthy of such high regard. So they spent their time coming up with many ways to cause Belfort physical and psychological torture. But that morning, when the wolf was being chased, they had gone too far, and once they heard Belfort’s sobs, they knew it. They finally understood how unrewarding their efforts truly were.

After Belfort ran off into the forest that day, Tane and Ponne spoke to their mother about the guilt they felt, and were told that even in the event that Belfort is found and returns to the palace, they should avoid any form of contact with him for any reason whatsoever. Tane and Ponne meekly accepted the commands of their mother, but still hoped to speak to Belfort in order to tell him how they feel. Even in the morning when the royal dogs were all

eating their breakfast. Diane's glare was a reminder of what was said the day before.

After Belfort had exited the palace itself that morning, Tane and Ponne spoke to their mother in the royal dog chamber once more regarding their apology, but were rejected once more.

"I told you girls," said Diane. "You are not to talk to your brother until I say so. He needs to know just how repulsive his actions were."

At first, Tane and Ponne believed Diane just didn't trust them enough to make a humble apology after all they had done to Belfort. But now they know the truth, and it only made them feel even worse.

"But he's suffered enough, mother!" argued Tane. "Not just yesterday, but his whole life!"

"It was because of us he ran off!" said Ponne. "We just want to tell him we're sorry!"

"You'll tell him once I allow it," said Diane. "Until then, keep your distance. Do I make myself clear?"

"Mother, this is unfair!" insisted Ponne.

"Do I make myself clear?!" snarled Diane, losing her patience.

Defeated, Tane and Ponne sighed, saying, "Yes, mother."

"Thank you," said Diane. "I'm glad we have an understanding."

Diane leaped up to her throne to rest on her bed. Tane and Ponne then looked at a portrait in the chamber. This portrait depicted Diane sitting atop a cushioned stool, and Belfort on the floor, his hind legs planted on ground level, and his front paws on the cushion, looking up to his mother, though both have their eyes closed. It was one of many portraits of the royal spaniels painted by Alexandre-François Desportes, by the king's request. But Tane and Ponne, in their jealousy of their brother, nearly ruined his chances of ever appearing in this portrait by ruining his coat. They even locked him in a trunk in an attempt to stop him. But Lupin was always there to help Belfort out of his plight, and in the end, Belfort joined his mother in posing as subjects for this portrait.

Seeing this portrait reminded Tane and Ponne of what was almost never accomplished. They looked to each other, with a feeling of guilt, not just for what they had said the day before, but for practically every other means of

torment they had caused their brother their whole lives. Determined to make amends, they left the royal dog chamber at once.

Chapter 7

Tane and Ponne searched several rooms in the large palace. Unlike Belfort, they're not quite as familiar with its layout. But they pressed on regardless to find their brother.

The last place they searched was the palace library. On a shelf, a Siamese cat named Ariane sat licking the back of her paw. When she heard the sound of the sisters calling Belfort's name, she leaped down with a wry smile.

"Oh? Are you two looking for Belfort?" she asked. "Because I'll have you know, even if he did come in this room, which he didn't, I'm not sure he'd be in the mood for your tortures this time. Besides, I thought he ran away."

"He came back last night," informed Tane. "And anyway, we're not looking for him to torment him. We want to apologize to him."

Unsurprisingly, Ariane was surprised to hear this. "Apologize? That's not like you at all. Are you sure you don't have some kind of ulterior motive to find him?"

"We've said some of the most terrible things to him yesterday, and we're hoping to let him know just how sorry we are," said Tane.

"Oh, NOW you're feeling sorry?" said Ariane. "If I'm not mistaken, his torment was all you wanted his whole life, was it not?"

"We thought it was," admitted Tane. "But after yesterday, when his wolf friend ran off into the forest, we realized it was no fun. Not for him, and not for us."

"Can you please help us find him?" asked Ponne.

"Why would I want to help you after everything you've done to him?" said Ariane. "You're gonna have to threaten me if you want my help."

Tane and Ponne were in no mood to threaten anyone, but clearly were also desperate.

"Please, Ariane!" Ponne shouted.

Ariane stared, still untrusting of Tane and Ponne. She could tell they want to talk to Belfort as soon as possible, but she also took their words with caution. She nodded her head toward the door as an indicator, accompanied by a smile that she tried to hide was not genuine. But it was right at that

moment as Ariane was about to exit the library, the sound of a dog's footsteps were heard. She immediately knew what this meant.

"Oh. Here he is. He was just on his way to the library anyway."

Belfort entered the library, and unsurprisingly, he was not happy to see his sisters there.

"I was hoping a good book would put my mind at ease for some time, if you so desperately need something to laugh at," he said.

To accommodate for lacking a sense of smell, he took to reading words that have been written in pen by humans. Studying of such feat proves to be difficult for a dog, or any animal really, but for Belfort, it was either a form of leisure or a means to solve a problem in one of his adventures with Lupin. Because of these studies, he is also able to study several subjects, among which includes various sciences. Fascinating subjects, but not the type a royal dog should be seen as proud of. He had simply come to the library to put his mind off his family until it was time to reconcile, but he had met his sisters again too soon.

"Ariane, have you been talking with my sisters?" asked Belfort.

"They have been looking for you," the cat replied. "They wanted to apologize for what happened yesterday."

"Do they now?" Belfort's voice had grown as cold as his mother's. His fear of meeting his sisters soon turned to anger. True, they hadn't thrown insults at him as of yet, but most would suppose that this fear turning to anger was a defense mechanism in the event that such thing would happen. And of course, in that anger, Belfort had not forgotten other tortures he had endured thanks to his sisters. "Anything else to note? Any other particular acts that have been committed with overdue apologies? For example, stealing my collar? Locking me in a trunk? All to stop me from posing in a portrait?"

"Belfort, you seem... scarier than usual," Ponne noticed.

"You're about as cold as you have been this morning," said Tane, shaking.

"Is that right?" said Belfort. "I suppose torment at the paws of one's own family, torment that has taken place his whole life, could cause a feeling of coldness."

This has been mentioned before, but Belfort and Lupin once had to rescue Tane and Ponne when they got lost in the Labyrinth of Versailles.

Despite Lupin's reluctance in doing so, Belfort told of how sometimes people do mean things because they are unhappy. Living as a palace dog has never been easy, given all the rules and orders that need to be followed. Belfort truly believed this, but in his anger stemmed from fear stemmed from a traumatic event that took place the day before this, he had forgotten it. But he also noticed something about his sisters' behavior.

"It's funny, though. I don't hear any laughter from either of you. What are you up to?"

For this particular inquiry, Belfort's anger is not at fault. In the past, Belfort learned that if there is ever a moment his sisters weren't actively bullying him, that meant they had something to hide. In one case, the queen's wig that had been ruined by one of the sisters' rounds of bullying another animal in the palace. Belfort was never their only target. But this time, Belfort's sisters, despite his unbelief, were genuine in their words. Before they could tell him this, the voice of their mother sounded behind the girls.

"Did I hear you two speaking to your brother even though I clearly instructed you not to?" she said.

"But mother, he deserves to hear what we have to say," said Tane.

"Not until the right time," Diane reminded.

"What WOULD be the right time, mother?" asked Belfort.

"Hm. I sense a deeper coldness than usual, Belfort," said Diane. "This isn't making your position with me any easier."

"I was hoping not to run into you because I thought you needed time before you forgave me," said Belfort. "But if it turns out I was wrong, then what will it take, mother? I need to know. What will it take to earn your forgiveness?"

"The wolf has escaped into the forest thanks to your assistance, and because you won't be seeing him again, I just want you to put him out of your mind. Maybe then, I will reconsider."

Of course, Belfort's family wouldn't have heard about Lupin's decision to stay within reach of the Palace of Versailles. He knew this, and yet his anger expanded beyond his sisters and spread to his mother. It was a most ridiculous condition to set, indeed.

"That's your condition?" he asked in a colder voice. "Utterly foolish, because I haven't lost Lupin. He is not gone forever."

"Denial will not change the condition, Belfort," said Diane.

"It is not denial," said Belfort. "I have met and spoken with him for myself after my sisters, your DAUGHTERS, said that no one could ever be my friend!"

At this revelation, the royal dogs gasped.

"Wait, really? Lupin's not gone?" said Ariane, who was equally surprised.

"No," said Belfort. "And he never will be."

Diane immediately knew what this meant. Her own son would continue to linger near a wild animal and call him a friend. The royalty shouldn't have to bear anything of this nature.

"We have been ordered to hunt down the wolf, and you allowed him to escape," reminded Diane with a condescending voice. "For your insubordination of the king's orders, and for your clinging to this low-class wild animal, you can never earn my forgiveness. Never."

Just as fear had led to anger, anger was quickly leading to hate. Maybe it was true that Belfort's sisters wanted to apologize, maybe it wasn't. Either way, it was clear that his mother was dismissive of him after the events of the day before, and it was only getting worse once she learned the wolf she thought she was chasing would not steer clear of the palace or her son.

"Master Louis forgives me," said Belfort. "Why can't you?"

"Master Louis has...?" Diane's surprise was genuine. "I was not aware of that."

Whether or not Diane was truly aware of Louis's leniency didn't matter to Belfort. His anger had already led to hate, and was unable to be contained any longer.

"Maybe I don't WANT your forgiveness! And whatever apology Tane and Ponne want to offer, I don't want it either! Lupin is more than just my friend. He has been a supportive wolf, one that is there to comfort me when I am sad, to assist those in need, to bring light to a dark world! He was always by my side to assist all the animals within the palace grounds! The menagerie, those who live in the palace itself, and even my family! That means you, mother! And you, my sisters! And yet, even after all the good that Lupin has done for you,

you tried to abscond with his life! Granted, it was under the king's orders, but my sisters seemed to take great joy in the idea, as it would cause me the most misery possible! And even while Lupin managed to live, they managed to cause that misery, laughing all the while! Even after all that Lupin has done for you, the three of you attempted to kill an innocent wolf that has been nothing but a great help to the palace! King's orders or not, THAT is unforgivable!"

This sudden outburst left everyone in the library shocked. Nobody had ever seen Belfort this angry, and no one especially ever heard him call anyone's actions unforgivable. Even Belfort himself realized this. His mouth hung open with the same look of shock his family shared. Diane had no choice but to inquire where Belfort had learned to speak in such a manner.

His shock caused Belfort much hesitation and deep breaths. He still couldn't believe it himself, but to call one's actions unforgivable... He was most certainly not the first to have done it, but he definitely had such word directed to him before. It was crucial of him to give his response, so he shouted, with tears streaming down his face,

"You, mother! I learned it from listening to you!"

That was the last thing he said before he exited the library sobbing. His family had been left in utter shock after what Belfort had said. Tane wondered if what Belfort said was right. Diane took a deep breath, and upon her exhalation, she too felt tears emerging from her eyes and streaming down her face.

"Yes," Diane confirmed. "He's right. What have I done to him?"

Diane was not the only one crying in the library. Her daughters soon joined her after she gave her answer. Understanding the gravity of the situation now, Ariane turned to where Belfort had fled the library, and exited through that same door.

Fear led to anger, anger led to hate, hate led to suffering. All four royal dogs of the palace had experienced this for themselves, and quickly understood just how serious this principle was if it were ignored.

Chapter 8

After making sure the coast was clear in the royal dog chamber, Lupin entered and immediately went to look at the portrait drawn of Belfort and his mother. Lupin remembered this portrait well, as this was the portrait that Tane and Ponne tried to stop Belfort from posing in. After enduring several means of torture, Belfort started to doubt himself, believing what his sisters said about him being unworthy of the portrait, unworthy of a position as a king's royal dog. But in this hour of inner turmoil, Lupin offered comforting words. In spite of his faults, Belfort had something the other royal dogs did not; heart. That was why master Louis loved him, and why Lupin loved him. The words of the wolf gave Belfort the courage he needed to stand up to his sisters and finally pose for the portrait.

Of course, Lupin felt no pride in encouraging Belfort to please his master and his mother. He only did what he did because that's what a true friend would do. Looking at the portrait today, however, he remembered how Belfort used to smile in the company of his mother, however authoritarian she may have been. Those days may seem as though they were over, but when Belfort hoped to make amends, Lupin hoped the same, for a smile would finally be restored to Belfort's face, just as in this portrait.

Lupin's thoughts were interrupted by a caterwaul that penetrated the palace. No, the sound was not that of a cat, but rather a dog. Belfort, who was still sobbing after the incident in the library, ran into the royal dog chamber and leaped for his bed, lying down, with both front paws over his snout. By the sound of his friend's cries, it was obvious to Lupin things didn't go well. But he wasn't going to avoid inquiry into the particulars. So he walked up to the bed and sat down next to his friend, asking what had happened.

"I've become my mother!" sobbed Belfort.

"What do you mean? Did you try talking to her?" asked Lupin. "Come on. Tell me everything. I need to know everything."

He couldn't hold back his tears or his sniffles, but Belfort could tell Lupin about everything that happened in the library. As a matter of fact, he spared no detail, how he had come into the library, met his sisters, with whom he had no desire to speak, then he met his mother, who still couldn't forgive the events of

the day before. His voice shook as he continued to explain, right up until the end, when he shouted,

“And then I said I would never forgive them, just as my mother said to me!”

His story finished, Belfort is once more overcome by his own suffering and continues wailing loudly. Lupin hated to see others cry, and it would only be worse if it were his own best friend. Choking up, Lupin lies down next to Belfort and places a front paw on top of his head.

“Belfort... I’m really sorry,” apologized Lupin. “This is all my fault. I should never have masked that wolf’s scent with my own. Heck, I should’ve just stayed hidden the whole time. All I did was make things worse for you.”

Hearing his own friend take the blame for his insubordination of the king’s orders, Belfort stopped crying and looked to his equally-depressed friend.

“Lupin, that’s nonsense,” said Belfort. “If you just stayed hidden without masking his scent, you would be trapped within the vicinity until YOU were caught.”

“Maybe it would’ve been better,” said Lupin, “if we never met at all.”

“More nonsense!” retorted Belfort. “I would never have gotten as far as I have now without you. If anything, you changed my life for the better, and I have returned the favor.”

Lupin smiled at his friend’s compliments, but the memories of yesterday have not left him alone, and so that smile quickly disappeared.

“We can’t hide it forever,” said Lupin. “They need to know the truth about the wolf they were supposed to have chased. You gotta tell them.”

“That won’t make anything better, Lupin,” said Belfort. “They’ll just think even less of me.”

“I wish I knew what else could be done now,” sighed Lupin. “But I’ve never had parents or siblings like you do, so what do I know? I’m just some stupid wolf from the garden.”

“Maybe. But you’re Belfort’s stupid wolf from the garden.” Ariane’s voice had just entered the chamber as the feline herself stepped into the room. Lupin was none too pleased for Ariane to have called him a stupid wolf, even if he said it first.

"Hey there, cat," said Lupin with an unamused sigh.

Ariane approached the dog bed and sat down to give the news.

"Belfort," she said. "I just want you to know that after all you've said, your mother has come to a realization. I'd expect her to be here in a little while."

"Oh no..." dreaded Belfort.

"I'm sure it's just what you've been waiting for," hoped Lupin. "And if they're coming, I think I'd better hide myself before they arrive."

"No need." In only two words, Diane had announced her and her daughters' presence. The three females all appeared very sorrowful. It was the sort of sorrow that Belfort had never seen in his mother and sisters before. Standing from his bed, Belfort walked up to his dog family.

"Mother," he said. "Look, if this is about what I said in the library, I'm sorry. I really am."

"No, Belfort. You were right," said Diane. "In attacking your friend the wolf, we really have done something unforgivable. And worse! When we failed to corner him, I released my frustration on you! It must have felt terrible to hear such a thing from your own mother, regardless of royal status. THAT is the unforgivable act that took place yesterday. Nothing you did, Belfort. With my realization, you have hereby earned my forgiveness."

"No, mother," said Belfort. "I don't deserve it. Not after my outburst today."

"And Lupin..." Diane said. "I am really sorry. After everything you've done..."

Belfort was surprised. It was the first time his mother had ever addressed Lupin by his name. But what would come next would forever change the relationship between the royal dogs.

"Diane..." Lupin said. "There's something I need to confess to you here and now."

"What?" said Diane.

"I was not the wolf you were supposed to hunt down yesterday," Lupin confessed.

"Lupin, what are you--" Belfort started, but Lupin raised a paw, as if signaling his friend to be quiet. Then he continued.

"The wolf you were meant to target was an alpha wolf named Remus. Belfort and I were helping him escape. In the end, he made it back to the forest in a cart that was going there to collect wood. As for that scent you caught that led you to me? I masked his scent with my own. True, Belfort was still disobeying the king's orders by helping a wild wolf to escape the enclosure, but I was making things worse. Everything that happened yesterday was my fault."

Diane appeared as though a cycle of her negative emotions such as those released the day before might start again as she looked to her son.

"Belfort. Is what he's saying true?" she asked.

Belfort took a breath before he answered. "Yes, mother. It's true. But Lupin, you really shouldn't take the blame like this."

"Belfort," Lupin said. "I was the one who first wanted to help Remus get back to the forest. If anyone's to blame, it's me."

"But I helped you," said Belfort.

"I initiated it," said Lupin.

Had Diane known the truth before she had recognized just how much pain Belfort endured that day, she and her daughters would have been more susceptible to attacking Lupin again. But she had already heard Belfort out, in spite of his words having been spoken out of fear and anger, and understood how truly inseparable her son is from the wolf. After hearing the wolf's confession, Diane's regrets only worsened.

"It doesn't matter to me which of you two is at fault for what happened yesterday," she said. "It doesn't matter which wolf we were targeting. We were still after the life of Belfort's best friend. That simple fact has not changed. If we were to have caught and killed him, it would've caused Belfort great sorrow. My one and only son, having suffered the loss of his one true friend, because of me. I have no right to call myself his mother."

"My dear Lupin," said Belfort, still in deep regret of his outrage that day, "I thank you for your support, but I have destroyed by chances today. I have no right to call myself her son."

Lupin finally understood just how dysfunctional Belfort's family truly was. As much as Diane cared for rules and order, it was getting in the way of her relationship with her children. But for this malady, he did find a solution.

In fact, it only took a few steps for him to walk to this solution. He told the royal dogs to join him, and together, all of the canines, four dogs and one wolf, stared at the portrait drawn by Monsieur Desportes.

“Take a good look at this portrait,” said Lupin. “What do you see?”

Belfort remembered this portrait well, and what it represented. “I see... A mother and her son, with stances that exude confidence. Belief in each other, and best of all, belief in themselves.”

“I believe I see the same thing,” said Diane.

“All I see are troublesome memories of our past crimes against our brother,” Tane said with deep regret.

“Because of us,” remembered Ponne, “this portrait almost never existed.”

“In fact,” said Belfort, “it was because of you this portrait exists at all, my dear Lupin.”

“All I did was give you the confidence boost you needed. The rest was all you,” Lupin reminded Belfort. “But you wanna know what I see in that portrait? I see two dogs that want to start over, and for everything to be the same as it used to be. Two dogs that are willing to overlook all the wrongs of the past and be forgiven of what they had done. You know, I think this portrait is just missing two other dogs willing to do the same thing,” said Lupin as he smiled at the two other dogs in question.

“Us?” said Tane.

“But we tried to kill you!” reminded Ponne.

“I know,” said Lupin. “But if you’re willing to be sorry, maybe Belfort is willing to forgive you. Aren’t you, Belfort?”

Tane and Ponne certainly seemed sorry enough, but Belfort needed to hear it from his sisters’ mouths to know for absolute sure.

“Please, Belfort!” begged Ponne. “We’re sorry!”

“We’ve tormented you many times before,” said Tane, “but yesterday, we’ve gone too far! Could you ever forgive us?”

Their shaking voices and the tears in their eyes said plenty to Belfort. Feeling as though a burden was being lifted from himself, he found himself willing to relieve his sisters of a remarkably similar burden. He smiled and walked up to nuzzle both of his sisters simultaneously, his sisters returning the favor. Recognizing the forgiveness in this action, the contagious smile

spread to Diane, Lupin, and Ariane. But it was at this moment, human footsteps were heard.

“Now would be a good time to hide,” said Diane to Lupin.

Lupin nodded and quickly hid behind Monsieur Desportes’s painting. The approaching footsteps belonged to master King Louis, who had just arrived to the pleasant surprise of Belfort and his sisters embracing. Next, Belfort turned to his mother, the two still smiling.

“I’m sorry, mother,” said the son

“I’m sorry, too, Belfort,” said the mother.

Having lifted each other’s heavy burdens at last, the fear turned to anger turned to hate turned to suffering had vanished, confirmed by the nuzzling embrace between mother and son. The only individual present happier than any of the animals in the chamber was the king himself.

“Come here, my royal dogs!” said the king as he knelt to the floor. “Enjoy your master’s embrace!”

All four royal dogs ran up to their master and had their small bodies wrapped in his arms. The dogs all engaged in an immediate competition to determine who could give their master the most licks to his face.

Ariane laughed as the dogs showed their affection for their master, “The king’s silly little dogs.”

Lupin, from his hiding spot, couldn’t help but chuckle a little bit. He loved watching the royal dogs, especially Belfort, be shown affection, and loved it even more when he saw Belfort returning said affection. But eventually, an opportunity to escape the chamber, directly behind the king. Louis’s eyes had been closed the whole time while the dogs showed their affection, so Lupin took the opportunity to sneak past Louis and out of the chamber, and eventually, out of the palace itself without being seen by anyone inside the palace.

Chapter 9

That night, after Diane's children had settled into their beds, Diane approached her only son now that everything from the day before had settled down.

"Before we sleep, Belfort," she said, "I wish to make one thing clear."

"Yes, mother?" said Belfort.

"I still don't care much for this wolf with which you enjoy your company," confessed Diane. Belfort was hardly surprised. Lupin was still a wild animal, after all. Something did trouble him, however.

"I could be mistaken," said Belfort, "but I was almost certain I heard you address him by name while you apologized to him."

"Did I?" Diane mused. "Hmm... Well, I suppose he's not as terrible as I thought he was. But I'd still rather be cautious around him."

Diane knew that Lupin would always be a part of Belfort's life, no matter what happened, and nothing she did or said could ever sway him from that.

"But no matter what company you keep, Belfort, you are my son, and I will always love you," Diane confirmed with a lick on top of her son's head. This surprised Belfort most of all that day. The feel of his mother's tongue brushing across his fur was something he rarely experiences, except whenever she bathes him.

"Good night, Belfort," Diane wished.

"Good night, mother," said Belfort as his mother returned to her throne to sleep. He then looked to the window behind him and said, "Good night, my dear Lupin. Until the morrow."

Even if Belfort was unable to see this for himself, Lupin, in fact, laid on top of the leaning tree he much favors over all other trees in the forest, and looked out in the direction of the palace, as if he were staring in the direction of his greatest and dearest friend. Before laying his head down to rest, he wished to that same friend,

"Good night, Belfort. And good job."